

Abraham Lincoln High School, Council Bluffs



"The collaborative aspect of PD has helped teachers to be more open to suggestions for how to use a strategy to help students with disabilities. Team teaching (general education and special education teachers in the same room) is a natural. PD creates norms that make it easier by creating an atmosphere of collaboration."

Implementation of the Iowa Professional Development Model

A. Description of District

Council Bluffs Community School District has 1450 students. Abraham Lincoln (AL) High School serves 1400 students. Of the total population, 30.4% are eligible for free and reduced lunch. The school population includes 12% minority students (including 10% Hispanic, and 22% students with IEPs and 504 plans). The high school includes grades nine through twelve and is structured in an eight period day. The school district had followed a block schedule until this year. Their class periods are 47 minutes except on Mondays when periods are 20 minutes to accommodate time for professional development.

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The graduation rate for 2004-2005 was 81.3%, increasing from 79.8% the year before, and 77.6% in 2002-2003. Abraham Lincoln was identified as a School in Need of Assistance due to the number of students in the low SES subgroup who lack proficiency in reading.

There are 82 FTE faculty members that serve at the high school.

Site Visit

Department of Education staff visited Abraham Lincoln High School on October 11, 2005. AL High School is one of 3 high schools of the 20 public schools in Council Bluffs. The principal was interviewed individually and as part of the professional development leadership team. The leadership team was interviewed as a group, and individual teachers representing a variety of content areas were interviewed. Roger ~, Director of Secondary Education, represented Council Bluff's central office in the interviews. Classrooms were visited to gather information about the implementation of professional development in the building.

Note: Building photo from www.councilbluffs-ia.gov/photos.asp?page=2

B. Iowa Professional Development Model: The Operating Principles

Focus on Instruction

The Council Bluffs Community School District has been implementing a district-wide professional development initiative titled *Accelerating Student Achievement (ASA)*. The district-wide PD focus is on academic instruction with an emphasis on building teacher repertoire in strategies that enable students to access the curriculum. Roger ~ provides leadership to

secondary programs in the implementation of ASA. Beginning this school year, each building has identified priority skills to develop and is using the Iowa Professional Development Model to implement selected strategies that were identified from a menu of strategies studied in prior years. At the high school they have studied their data and identified making inferences in reading and math problem solving as the critical areas of student need. It is evident from the interviews and classroom observations that the administrators and the faculty are focused on increasing student achievement through improved instructional practices. The leadership of this high school has an expectation that teachers will study their own practice and use data to make decisions about instruction.

Focus on Instruction: "There is more discussion of the science of teaching vs. the art of teaching, and more dialogue about how to reach students and the things they can do to accomplish student learning. There has been a big shift away from making excuses and the blaming of students [for lack of achievement]."

Participative Decision Making

The professional development leadership team at the high school is made up of the principal (Melanie ~), the AEA school psychologist (Deb ~, and 5 teachers representing the following content areas: Math, Chemistry, Physics, Social Studies, and Talented and Gifted. This team has been operational for four years and some of the members have served on this team throughout the four years. Until this year, the members of the leadership team primarily had a training role (presenting theory and demonstrations of the strategies being studied). Currently, the role of the leadership team is being broadened to include the study of implementation and the examination of formative data. There was a district-wide training for leadership teams provided by the central office in the summer of 2005 to orient the teams to the district-level and building-level priorities for professional development. The PD Leadership team meets at least weekly to plan and prepare.

A district level professional development team comprises representatives from each of the buildings in the Council Bluffs district. This team reviews data and provides input on the professional development plans originated at the central office level.

Simultaneity

Over the last four years the district has introduced a large number of strategies and instructional techniques to improve teacher capacity. This year there is a concerted effort to focus on priority strategies and concentrate on getting full implementation of the selected strategies that address student needs for the building. Interviews indicated that the areas of student need selected for AL were making inferences and problem solving. Interviews and classroom observations identified multiple strategies and approaches that were considered the professional development focus including: vocabulary, 6 step process, non-linguistic representation, Freyer Model, teaching text backwards, and L to J. Other initiatives mentioned included a ninth grade program called

“Relationships, Rigor and Relevance plus 9”, ELL training, and the study of methods to support students of poverty.

Individual Teacher Career Development Plans are in place for each career teacher, and an effort has been made to connect individual plans to the building-wide professional development plan. The individual plans align with the study and implementation of strategies that have been identified as a building level priority.

Leadership

Principal Melanie ~ attends leadership team meetings and routinely attends collaborative team meetings. The principal joins the meetings of specific teams when they need additional support or leadership. The principal is very familiar with the strategies being studied and is able to articulate what is being studied and the rationale for these practices. Melanie is recognized by her staff as an instructional leader. Walk throughs have been conducted by the principal intermittently, and the principal has a goal to do walk throughs more often.

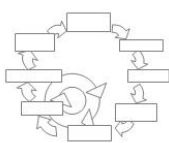
The principal has used the performance review process to stress the importance of teacher engagement in professional development by conducting observations to look for evidence of Standard 7 (“Engages in Professional Growth”) and by looking for teacher applications of the strategies and practices being advanced through professional development.

Leadership: Principal -- “PD can create a positive climate. We see more collegiality about important things. [Professional development] opens up the conversation about learning in their classrooms. High school teachers can tend to be independent contractors, but this gives them more focus and a common understanding about language. There is more dialogue among teachers, and more consistency from room to room. Because of professional development there is more commonality among teachers about what is effective.”

Structures are in place to increase distributed leadership in the building. There are no formal roles that create teacher leadership, but teachers on the leadership team are asked to do some direct training and demonstrations. Leadership team members make decisions about the delivery of professional development. Central office administrators prescribe what is to be covered in PD learning opportunities, and the building leadership team determines the best way to deliver the training, making adjustments to the plans provided by central office as needed.

AEA support in this building focuses more on the generic functions of school improvement and on special education functions than on the professional development provider role. The AEA school psychologist attends the PD leadership team and helped with delivering training on the ASA strategies. The AEA recently completed an audit as part of the technical assistance provided to Schools in Need of Assistance.

C. The Professional Development Cycle



As is true of all the schools and districts implementing the Iowa Professional Development Model, Abraham Lincoln High School addressed some components of the PD cycle more thoroughly than others. ALH’s literacy initiative is focused on mastery of content area reading strategies (ASA), the use of collaborative teams to drive their implementation of those strategies, and the study of teacher implementation and student growth.

Collecting and Analyzing Student Data

At Abraham Lincoln High School the Leadership Team has examined ITED data, although initial analysis of data and setting of professional development goals/targets were done at the district central office level. The staff as a whole does not appear to have been involved in the analysis of student ITED data. As a SINI school, AL High School has identified student learning goals in both reading and math.

The district routinely uses multiple sources of data to decide PD priorities. ITED data are used in this report to describe the student population. In the 2003-2004 academic year, 26.8% of Abe Lincoln 11th graders were non-proficient in reading and 29.6% were non-proficient in math. For low SES 11th graders, those figures were 42.3% and 47%, respectively, and for IEP students, 81.6% and 78.9%. Teachers engage in the discussion of student data and the implications of the findings during department meetings. The faculty does seem to be aware that they have a sizable group of students with learning needs, and engaging in the SINI process with AEA13 has heightened awareness of student needs.

Goal Setting

The Council Bluffs Community School District has set both literacy and math targets for professional development, although the literacy targets are the focus of whole school effort more than math, which is primarily a departmental focus. A review of Council Bluff's District Career Development Plan suggests that the goals are aligned with district student data and that there is tight coupling among the data, the goals, and the PD target. The annual goals for ALH are to increase proficiency levels in reading, mathematics and science, aligning with the district Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) goals.

Selecting Content

Abraham Lincoln High School is in its fourth year of studying a large array of instructional strategies. *Accelerating Student Achievement* (ASA) serves as the content for the school's professional development program. District personnel developed training materials using *Classroom Instruction that Works* (Marzano, Pickering, Pollock, 2001) and related resources. The content selected is intended to benefit the full K-12 grade span.

Special education teacher on content:
"These strategies have leveled the playing field – they're very helpful for special education students. It makes sense to study what general ed is learning. The strategies provide a framework for how to learn material."

On content: "PD has really helped me teach but I need more insight on when to utilize what – there are so many areas to cover."

Designing Process for Professional Development

Council Bluffs Community School District is committed to providing time for professional development. Mondays are late start days in the district and AL teachers have ninety minutes on Monday mornings for professional development. We did not observe a Monday professional development session but understand that teachers

"Teachers are recognizing that there are not as many differences between special education students and general education students as they once thought. There are not as many modifications needed as you would think."

meet 45 minutes as a large group to discuss and review the strategies. Teachers then go directly to their collaborative teams where they work together on specific strategies as well as plan their use of the strategies. Some teams spend the entire 45 minutes in small groups sharing lessons they have done, although intermittently time is provided for the collaborative development of a lesson.

The professional development design includes theory, demonstration, opportunities for practice and collaboration. In the early years of professional development with ASA strategies, training was conducted with the entire group. Trainers presented each strategy and tried to use the strategy in their presentations. Few demonstrations were included in these presentations but last year an effort was begun to develop a Video Journal by taping classroom lessons. This product will be used to support the training of new teachers.

Modules on each of the ASA strategies to be learned have been developed by the district office and all schools in the district use these materials (ASA Teacher Guides).

On-Going Cycle

The on-going cycle of learning opportunities, collaborative team meetings, the study of implementation, and the analysis of formative student data occurs primarily in the structure of Monday morning PD meetings (a late start day for students).

All teachers are engaged in collective study of the professional development content. Learning opportunities are structured by the modules which provide facilitators with a variety of presentation formats including lecture, demonstrations by teachers or video tapes of teacher demonstrations, literature to read, and group activities.

Collaboration: "The collaborative structures have improved collegiality. Teachers go to a reading teacher who is an expert on vocabulary to learn strategies to use with students. There is more collaboration."

Collaboration and Implementation At Abraham Lincoln, teachers selected their own collaborative teams rather than being assigned to teams. Some are subject area groups and others are interdisciplinary. Teams range in size from four to ten members. Special education teachers are integrated into all teams. General education teachers and special education teachers who co-teach do planning together on collaborative teams. The collaborative team process has enhanced the co-teaching arrangement by increasing special education teachers' knowledge of the general education curriculum and improving the planning process for supporting students with disabilities. The outcome of this collaborative work has been increased use of the general education curriculum by special education teachers.

Collaborative work is structured by a district format based on the following questions:

- What knowledge will the students be learning? (set objectives)
- How will we know if students have learned this knowledge? (formative assessment planning)
- What will we do to help all students acquire and integrate the knowledge (instructional strategies to use)
- What will we do to help all students practice, review and apply this knowledge?

Special education on collaboration: "It helps to team with a regular ed teacher. There's not as much difference between special education and regular ed students as we expected, not as many modifications as you would think."

General education teacher on collaboration: "The collaborative piece of PD has helped teachers be more open to suggestions for how to use a strategy . . . [collaboration] creates norms that make everything easier."

All teams use this structure but the actual work of teams varies significantly from group to group, e.g., some teams do extensive sharing, some develop lessons, some use the expertise of peers to solve problems.

In interviews, teachers were overwhelming positive about the collaborative component of their PD program. Many expressed a desire to observe in other classrooms in order to learn more from their peers and then immediately noted the time and logistical constraints associated with observation. Most, however, felt that time with their collaborative team was yielding benefits for both them and their students.

Implementation: "Nobody said anything about how often these strategies should be used. It is up to the teachers."

Implementation: "Teachers are more comfortable working with all students, and they feel like they are reaching the students who are struggling."

Formative Data Collection Formative evaluation of the AL High School's PD initiative (ASA) does not appear to be centralized at this time. Individual teams and departments have developed systematic formative measures to study mastery of various benchmarks within curriculum areas, but we were unaware of any school-wide measures. If the intent of ASA is to increase reading comprehension, there probably should be periodic measures of reading comprehension school-wide. However, if the intent of ASA is to make the curriculum more accessible to all students, including struggling readers, students with disabilities and the poor, then the current approach is quite appropriate.

Summative Data

As is true of all Iowa Schools, ITBS and ITED (high school) data are analyzed to determine program efficacy. Students scoring below the 41st percentile in reading and math are judged to be non-proficient by Iowa standards.

Reading and math scores for AL High School's 11th graders have been relatively flat for the past four years (norms for ITED were changed during the 2000-2001 academic year and thus we have compared only scores recorded during the past four years.)

The outcomes of professional development evaluation are shared with the faculty and a representative group of parents.

Abraham Lincoln High School Eleventh Grade ITED Scores: Reading

Year	Low	Intermediate	High	% Proficient
2001-2002	28.5	59.4	12.2	71.6
2002-2003	19.5	66.3	14.2	80.5
2003-2004	26.8	55.7	17.5	73.2
2004-2005	30.2	55.4	4.6	70.0

External Technical Assistance

This district primarily relies on central office leadership to provide technical assistance to buildings.

Training: "Here they just describe the strategies, sometimes they just talk it through, and occasionally we are given a demonstration but less this year. We need greater depth, the research base and more modeling. We need more practice and application."

D. Some Site Visit Observations/Recommendations

At AL High School we were immediately struck by the generally positive attitude of the faculty toward professional development. Teachers felt they were benefiting from PD, and although many had suggestions for how specific components might be improved, their input was constructive rather than critical. Staff especially praised the collaborative piece of the Iowa Professional Development Model. The collaboration ethic at this school is strong and positive. Teachers who don't participate in collaborative teams and implementation efforts at this point are seen as objects of curiosity "I don't understand why ____ won't do this – it's strange." The staff seems to understand better than many secondary faculties that they all "own" all the students.

This school is attempting to implement multiple initiatives. While the intent to increase student achievement and improve the programs and services at ALH by introducing a variety of reform efforts is commendable, the complexity of supporting so many initiatives simultaneously may contribute to the lack of full implementation and results. The initial SINA audit report also recommended that AL High School address the issue of competing initiatives and work on focusing their professional development efforts.

We observed some confusion regarding the implementation component of the Iowa professional development model. Interestingly, both site and district leaders identified implementation as an area needing improvement and had begun plans to improve it. We noticed many of the planning forms in use in the school were labeled "implementation" and wondered if teachers believed that planning for the use of various strategies was the same thing as reporting exact usage (after the fact). Again, the leadership team might clarify processes for building implementation plans and reporting implementation.

In our earlier comments regarding formative evaluation, we noted the need for clarity regarding the intended outcomes of the Abe Lincoln PD program with respect to student learning. Our only recommendation here would be that the Leadership Team set some expectations about formative evaluation, collect the results, analyze the data and publish it back to teachers and students.

The use of summative data to should lead districts that have not experienced gains in student achievement to reflect on the various components of the professional development plan that may need adjustments. This district has made several adjustments to their plan in their efforts to get positive student achievement results. Their continuing emphasis on how to refine professional development is to be commended. In planning the next cycle of professional development, careful use of student data and teacher implementation data should inform the selection of content and plans for supporting the collective study of this content.